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ABSTRACT

What is currently happening in China is similar to what happened in the United States in the 1950s and the Soviet Union in the 1970s--television is quickly becoming a mainstay of popular entertainment and news. The Chinese government has made substantial efforts to provide television service to all regions of the country, with importance attached to satellite communications because of China's large and difficult geography. Purchases of television sets are rising, replacing radios as the new consumer status symbol. Modernization under Deng Xiaoping's administration has been critical in the development of the television industry; like all of China's mass communications systems, the television industry is operated by the government. Television is becoming less political and more a source of entertainment, although news is still the subject of greatest interest across all media, followed by sports, entertainment, and educational programming. Television's future as a popular and pervasive communications medium is probably irreversible, and is tied to the political and economic future of China. (One table of data is included; three tables of data and 68 references are appended.) (MM)

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# CHINA: The Television Revolution

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# CHINA: The Television Revolution

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## Introduction

> After dinner--around 9 p.m.--I took a walk down some of the narrow sidestreets of Yangzhou. Bustling during the day, they were deserted now; the doors to the small cement and plaster homes were closed. Only some faded "spirit posters" were hanging out front to keep evil spirits away. Curiosity made me start looking in some windows--easily within my reach. What were people doing? They were crouched in front of TV sets! As far as I could tell, every person in every house was watching the same Kung Fu movie. It seems so incongruous with the oxen and hand plows in the fields...
>
> N. K. Rivenburgh, excerpt from journal entry 3 May 1985, Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, China

China is not unfamiliar with mass communication. In the tenth century she heralded the invention of printing with movable type. And, after centuries of dynasties, regimes, kingdoms, and aristocracies, the Chinese found themselves captured and captivated by Mao Zedong's Marxist-Leninist doctrine blaring through loudspeakers--some 7 million--across the country. They can be found "in village squares, school playgrounds, marketplaces, rice paddies, factories, mines, communal mess halls, dormitories, households, and even on treetops and telephone poles."[1]

A second broadcast wave was the radio. Still the most popular source of news, radios transport easily to wheat and rice fields, sit on street corners, or ride with owners on bikes.

Now, in the 1980s, it's the television. The phenomenon happening today in China is similar to that in the U.S. in the 1950s and USSR in the 1970s. Television is quickly becoming a mainstay of popular entertainment and news. And, beginning with the 1979 showing of the American series "Man from Atlantis," it is also becoming a relished link between a long isolated China and the outside world.

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[1]Lent, John A. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific*. 1978. The loudspeakers are used less frequently today after nationwide complaints of "noise pollution."

## Media Facilities

Believing an efficient, nationwide communications system is essential to modernization, the Chinese government has made substantial efforts to provide television service to all regions of the world's third largest country--slightly larger than the contiguous United States. Because of the extreme mountainous terrain of the west, rain forests and rugged areas of the south, and high steppes and remote desert of the northwest,[1] it wasn't until the launching of China's first communications satellite in 1984, and a second in February of 1986, that state-owned Chinese Central Television (CCTV) was able to reach all the 29 provinces including Tibet and Xinjiang.[2]

Some experts believe the country would require 10,000 TV receiving stations to adequately cover its vast territory (3,692,244 sq. mi.). Currently, there are 2,050 TV receiving stations throughout the country used for both telecommunications and television service with plans to reach 5,000 within the next five years. This is quite an improvement over a mere 53 stations as of October 1985.[3]

In addition to its two domestic communications satellites and growing number of receiving stations, at latest count China is equipped with 5 ground stations, 202 TV centers and over 400 local and network TV relay transmitter stations. Since 1980 the country has leased transponder space of INTELSAT V to provide international TV exchange to major cities on five continents.[4]

Because of its large and difficult geography, China has attached great importance to satellite communications, eagerly importing technology from abroad and

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[1]China's topography roughly divides into 3 tiers of elevation sloping downward from a mountainous and rugged west to plateau to low plains and coastal regions in the east.

[2]Yougao, Zhou. "Leaping Forward." *Inter Media*, July/Sept. 1986. Refer to Appendix A: Map of China for provincial boundaries.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. 1987.

cooperating with foreign firms on the manufacture of satellites as part of its "Seventh 5-Year Plan."[1] In total, the government has launched 18 satellites--mostly for scientific research or military reconnaissance.[2]

China's television broadcast system utilizes a 625-line standard and PAL system similar to most of western Europe (except France's SECAM system).[3]

## Television Set Ownership.

It has been estimated that of a population of 1,064,147,038[4] as many as 90 percent of major urban (Beijing, Shanghai) dwellers and 20 percent of rural residents own a TV set. These percentages are misleading if correlated to viewership because group viewing of television is common--especially in rural areas where it's easy to gather audiences of 10 or more at a time. For example, a suburb of Beijing with 6.7 TV sets per 100 households was found to have 87 percent of its residents regular television viewers.[5]

TV sets are considered one of the Four Big Things desired by Chinese (the others include refrigerator, washing machine, and stereo cassette player), replacing the radio as the consumer status symbol. However, at approximately US$370 for a black and white set and US$700 for a color set ($1335 for an imported set) in a country where the average urban income is $300/year, such a purchase is not a bargain.[6] But, as can be seen in the graph on the following page, television popularity shows no slowdown in

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[1] "Song Jian Speaks on Satellite Communications." *FBIS 24 Dec. 1986.* The Sixth (1981-1985) and Seventh 5-year plans (1986-1990) emphasize both consumption and the swift modernization of economic management processes, including going "outside" for modern methods and technologies.

[2] "World Radio and Television Receivers." *Inter Media*, March 1986.

[3] Television Digest, Inc. *Television and Cable Factbook*. 1986.

[4] July, 1987.

[5] Abel, Allen. "China's New Television." *World Press Review*, April 1985.

[6] *International Television Almanac*. Richard Gertner ed. 1986.

the 1980s. Purchases are on the rise. Sales in the 1980-82 period saw a near doubling of existing stock each year.

Such extraordinary sales figures should not be mistaken for excessive prosperity in Deng's modernizing China, rather, new priorities. Allen Abel commented in World Press Review (April 1985) "the boundary between getting by and affluence is said to be crossed when the black and white is traded for a color set." Currently black and white sets outnumber color by almost 5 to 1.[1] But according to Todd Campbell, a former ABC correspondent in China, color sets are becoming such a status symbol that many urban families would rather wait until they can afford one rather than buy a black and white. Many protect their TV sets with cloth or boxes when not in use.

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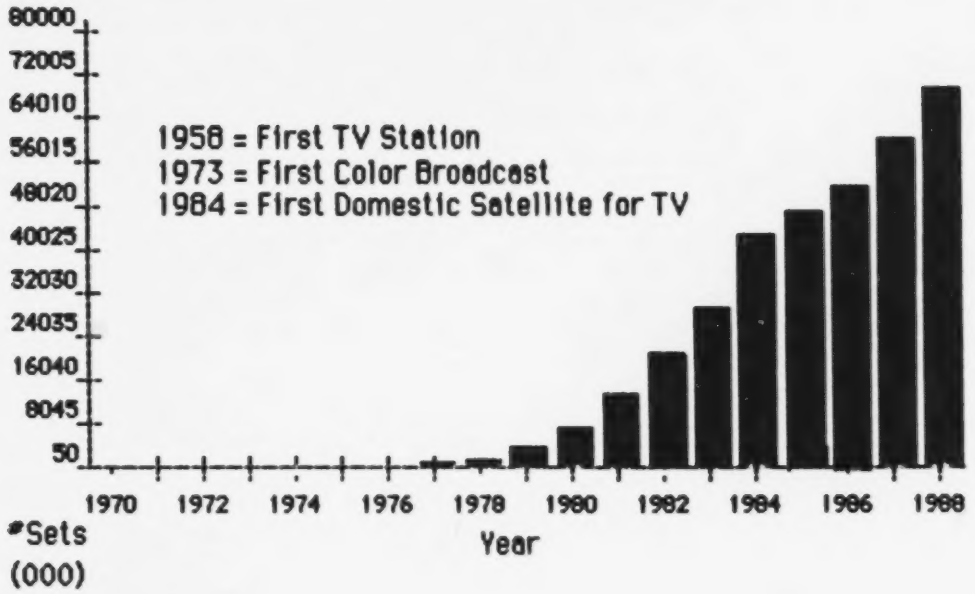
[1] Ibid. The standard of living is increasing in some sectors as a result of Deng's economic reforms and is predominant in certain rural areas where peasants can now sell the excess produce from family owned plots for profit. The overall standard of living is still basically poor.

**GROWTH IN TV SET OWNERSHIP 1970 - 1988*[1]**




* estimated

Current (1987) estimates put TV set ownership at 60 million sets--one for every 18 people. Although recent figures suggested by NBC's Tom Brokaw on location in China with "The Today Show"[2] and The Times[3] venture as high as 80-100 million sets, actual government figures and current growth estimates of approximately 7.1 million sets per year are based significantly on domestic manufacturing and import limitations--not necessarily desire. To purchase TV sets waiting lists and long lines are common. In fact, in 1985 a government official was able to defraud other local officials and private individuals out of $4.5 million in deposits for color TV sets he was

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[1]Information for graph compiled from the following sources: Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. 1987; Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986. Survey conducted in 1982; Sartori, Carlo. "TV Around the World." *World Press Review*, Dec. 1986; and *International Television Almanac*. Richard Gertner ed. 1986.

[2]"The Today Show." NBC's Tom Brokaw on location in Shanghai, 30 Sept. 1987.

[3]"Into China." *The Times*, 10 June 1987. U.S. TV set ownership is estimated at 140 million.

supposedly planning to import from Hong Kong.[1] Despite some unmet demand, by the year 2000 China will have the largest TV viewing audience in the world.[2]

## A Brief History

The first TV station and broadcasts appeared in 1958 from Beijing, but there were only 20 TV sets in all of China. At a time when the TV explosion was in full force in the U.S., China's industry was getting a slow start as a result of a severe economic crisis in 1961-62, which stifled development of adequate broadcast and receiving equipment and shut down the 12 provincial TV stations that had started broadcasting in heavily populated urban areas. Shortly thereafter, the industry struggled under the onslaught of the Cultural Revolution, which threw the country into political turmoil from 1966 well into the 1970s.

Most of the closed stations returned to the air in 1969-70. By the early 1970s several new municipal stations were added (for a total of 31 nationwide), but there were still only 50,000 sets--1 for every 16,400 people--limiting impact on the mass public.[3] Most existing sets were in party and government offices, workers' clubs, and commune halls. It wasn't until the late 1970s that the industry began the rapid growth period it's still enjoying today.

The early broadcasting equipment was imported from the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. In 1972 a group of Chinese technicians visited several European countries to examine color television services--an adventuresome trip for a country in political and economic isolation.[4] CCTV began color broadcasting in May 1973 and color programming in 1977. By 1975 live programs from stations in Beijing, Shanghai,

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[1] Aikman, David. *Pacific Rim: Area of Change, Area of Opportunity*. 1986.

[2] Sartori, Carlo. "TV Around the World." *World Press Review*, Dec. 1986.

[3] Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986.

[4] Lent, John A. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific*. 1978.

Guangzhou, and Tianjin were transmitted to broadcast stations in all major cities by microwave relay and coaxial cable lines.[1] There were 47 stations serving all provinces except Tibet and broadcasting for about 3 hours a night or less.[2] Microwave relay reception was varied at best.

Before the introduction of domestic satellite communications, CCTV recorded its programs and sent video tape by plane to local television stations outside of Beijing. Most urban audiences saw the CCTV programs three days late. In remote regions, with no civil airport, the time lag could easily be as long as 15 days.[3] Today, any time lag would more likely be due to political considerations as with the recent uprisings in Tibet. The Chinese audience was first exposed--via domestic media--to the incidents three days late.[4]

By 1982 television reached an audience of 350 million, with its electronic companion, radio, reaching an additional 400 million. The 4,000-year-old civilization was finally a part of the television revolution.

## The Political Environment

China's single-minded pursuit of modernization for the past seven years under Deng Xiaoping has been critical in the development of the television industry--and vice versa. For the first time since the 1949 takeover China has looked outward, establishing normal relations with the rest of the world and opening its door to foreign technology, trade, and business--as well as news and entertainment.

Three key components of the modernization plan are rural reform, urban reform, and an open door policy.[5] The government uses the media as a mouthpiece to

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[1]U.S. Government Foreign Area Studies. *China: A Country Study*. 1981.
[2]UNESCO. *World Communications*. 1975.
[3]Yougao, Zhou. "Leaping Forward." *Inter Media*, July/Sept. 1986.
[4]Tom Brokaw on "NBC's Nightly News," 9 Oct. 1987.
[5]Aikman, David. *Pacific Rim: Area of Change, Area of Opportunity*. 1986.

promote modernization by updating and informing people about the economic priorities of the government and depicting models of the productivity necessary to achieve these reforms.[1] One such engrossing,135-minute show featured "positive thinking" speeches from a professor, a factory director, a welder, and a chicken-raising expert...[2]

And, although foreign newscasts tend to portray a world of conflict and tension beyond Chinese borders, television programs such as "Seeing the World" and "One World" are seen by some western observers as deliberate attempts to eliminate Chinese provincialism and teach people a little more about the outside world.[3] Foreign residents in China have a different story. They contend the bureaucracies are too large and the programming too arbitrary to be part of some meaningful plan [4]

The new economic policy, highlighted by the phrase "permit some peasants to get rich first," allows households who are more industrious and better connected to use those advantages to accrue wealth and stimulate the economy.[5]

Some criticize the policy as sacrificing ideological strength and nationalism. But for Deng there seems to be no fundamental contradictions between the socialist system and the market economy as long as public ownership remains dominant and a common prosperity is pursued. Deng's move away from Soviet-style central planning to a more market oriented economy has met with its share of internal struggles among party bureaucrats. There are concerns--Deng's included--about the impacts of

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[1]"Shanxi Radio on Developing Radio and Television." *FBIS 26 Nov. 1986.*

[2]"TV Airs Report-Making Meeting at Zhongnanhai." *FBIS 17 Nov. 1986..*

[3]Robinson, Deanna Campell. "Changing Functions of Mass Media in the People's Republic of China." *Journal of Communication,* Autumn 1981.

[4]Campbell, Todd and Ina Chang. Personal Interview, 10 Nov. 1987. Mr. Campbell has spent the last 3 years in China as a correspondent for ABC television. His wife, Ina, was a correspondent in Beijing for AP. Both speak fluent Chinese.

[5]"rang yixie nongmin xian fugilai" Zweig, David. "Prosperity and Conflict in Post-Mao Rural China." *The China Quarterly,* March 1986.

liberalization and an open door policy which allows for the intrusion of western culture.[1]

These concerns hit center stage soon after the December 1986 student demonstrations in Shanghai. In a move to reassure the party, Deng swiftly shut down a number of journals and papers, forced China Communist Party (CCP) leader Hu Yaobang to resign, and issued several well-heeded warnings to the artistic and intellectual community. According to Deng, new energy will be funnelled into the mandatory political courses at schools in an attempt to counter "negative" western influences. He commented, "the continuing dilemma confronting China is whether it can absorb technological accomplishments without embracing the ideas that gave rise to those achievements."[2]

The television industry seemed to avoid any direct criticisms, but may have been a contributor to the backlash as pointed out by Orville Schell in New Perspectives Quarterly (Spring 1987):[3]

> What I see are programs that are utterly amazing and bewildering because they lack the focus I expect from Chinese government television--usually an organ of propaganda. Some of the programs have no meaning. Some have some meaning. Some are downright subversive, and some are just happy and tacky. But all the programs are unbelievable.
>
> There is a New Year's show in which one of the acts is a woman wearing a People's Liberation Army uniform--I think she's actually in the army--playing an electric guitar. She bounds up onto a stage bejeweled with lights and belts out a tune called "Battlefield Disco," about China's war with Vietnam....
>
> I have a feeling the leadership has simply become fed up looking at television, looking at new fashions in the streets, looking into bookstores where even I'm jarred by the sight of

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[1]Gargan, Edward. "Papers Play up Deng's Ideas Signaling Changes for China." *New York Times*, 2 July 1987.

[2]Gargan, Edward. "China's Cultural Crackdown." *New York Times Magazine*, 12 July 1987.

[3]Schell has written over a dozen books about Chinese political and social relationships. He has travelled to China many times, forming friendships with a number of leading writers and intellectuals.

Sigmund Freud, John Locke, Machiavelli, Jesus Christ, and Alvin Toffler right next to the collected works of Chairman Mao.

Despite any suggestions of relaxed standards, all television stations are owned by the government and are not considered politically independent or neutral. Historically, the media have been a tool of class struggle. Mao's Marxist-Leninist doctrine emphasized the "effective manipulation and persuasive mass media as an instrument of power and control."[1] And, until the mid to late 1970s, China's media closely followed the communist press theory suggested by Wilbur Schramm in Four Theories of the Press.

Before his removal last spring, Hu Yaobang stated that the purpose of the media are to serve as a transmission line from the party to the people. He also stressed obligations of accuracy and using the facts to "spread to the whole country, and the world, the ideas of the party and government and the opinions and activities of the people in various areas."[2]

But certainly not heterodox opinions. Although modernization policies have allowed for a new emphasis on quality news reporting, investigative reporting, and experimentation in the journalism profession, individual journalists remain liable for their news and caution is exercised. Even with the overall expansion and decentralization seen in China's media in the 1980s, the government rejects any suggestions that media goals are different or control be further relaxed. What really is happening is a cyclical process with a minority of journalists pushing limits during liberal times then retracting when the government decides things have gone too far.

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[1]Lent, John A. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific.*, 1978.

[2]Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986.

## Policy and Administrative Control

Each of China's mass communication systems is operated as a government agency. Under the CCP's Central Committee, Secretariat, and Propaganda Bureau is the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television, established in a 1982 reorganization, with primary administrative control over television. It wasn't until January 1986 that the film industry was moved away from the Ministry of Culture to reside under the auspices of this Ministry. Officials felt television and film "have substantial contributions for each other."[1] The China Communications and Broadcasting Electronics Corp., established in March 1987 to accelerate the development of China's radio and television industry, is another government organ responsible for research, development, manufacturing, marketing, maintenance, and trade.[2] All media workers are assigned to their positions by officials designated by the Party.

Directly under the Ministry is the only national network, Central China Television or CCTV[3], headquartered in new, modern facilities in Beijing and broadcasting across the country.

In 1981 CCTV had a staff of 980 and produced 25 regular programs on two channels. Most large cities have two stations (one CCTV, one provincial). A handful of major cities (e.g., Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou) have three stations (CCTV, provincial, and local). According to some U.S. and Australian programming exporters, the provincial stations function surprising independent of Beijing.

Despite plenty of national programming, stations like Shanghai Provincial TV employs 400 and Shaanxi TV 170. Such numbers create a capacity for significant local programming among the 202 stations nationwide. This could be seen as critical in a

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[1] "Ai Zhisheng on Merger of Film Industry with TV." *FBIS 29 May 1986.*
[2] "Chinese TV & Radio." *New York Times,* 18 March 1987.
[3] Radio's counterpart is the Central People's Broadcasting Station (CPBS).

country of eight major dialects and several minority tongues.[1] However, all CCTV and most provincial stations air in Mandarin, the national language. Only local stations and remote provincial stations (e.g., Tibet) make some effort at local dialect programming. Most Chinese have a basic grasp of Mandarin. But to compensate for difficulties in understanding, some shows (and almost all movies) have subtitles in Chinese characters--which are universal. For example, an imported Hong Kong film would be made in Cantonese, dubbed in Mandarin, and subtitled with Chinese characters for national distribution.

## Television Funding

Funding for television comes from a combination of government support and advertising revenues. Considered by Mao direct products of bourgeois capitalism, advertisements have only been allowed on television since March 1979.[2] Deng, however, feels advertising will directly promote economic growth and aid in modernization efforts. Some experts believe the phased introduction of advertising has been a carefully planned tool of social change to convince Chinese that a market economy is not incompatible with socialism. One Shanghai newspaper went as far as to say:

> Good advertising can make our cities beautiful, lift our spirits, and make us feel proud of a thriving socialist economy or culture in a cheerful artistic sense.[3]

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[1]Mandarin, Yue, Wu, Minbei, Minnan, Xiang, Gan, and Hakka are the major dialects.

[2]Anderson, Michael H. "China's 'Great Leap' Toward Madison Avenue." *Journal of Communication*, Winter 1981. The first ad appeared during a women's basketball game on Shanghai TV. It featured a popular Chinese basketball star and several teammates drinking a local softdrink, Xingfu (Lucky Cola). The drink's logo was strikingly similar to that of Coca-Cola.

[3]Ibid.

Chinese broadcasters also welcome even minimal relief to tight government budgets. In 1985, $500 million was spent in China, in all media, on advertising (as compared to $94.8 billion in the U.S.). Television ads accounted for 11 percent of that amount.[1] Advertising does not interrupt programming. Instead, ads are shown in blocks that can run up to 10 minutes between shows. In 1986 nationwide TV commercials ranged from as low as $625 for a 15-second spot and $1800 for a 1-minute spot to $2025 for a 30-second prime time spot.[2] All extremely reasonable by U.S. standards.

For imported foreign programming, it has become common for Chinese stations and the program provider (e.g., CBS, BBC, 20th Century Fox, CNN, Walt Disney) to arrange a 50-50 split on commercial fees, eliminating any program fees. In such cases, the program provider also solicites foreign advertisers. The ad rates in these situations are much higher: up to $10,000-13,000 per minute. Such deals provide a financial incentive for Chinese broadcasters to air imported programs. Both foreign and Chinese advertisers also buy time direct from CCTV and provincial stations. Harry Reid, Chairman of Ogilvy & Mather (HK) Private Ltd. estimates that total foreign ad spending in China is at 25 million entering 1987.

## Television Programming

Close observers of China seem to agree that television is playing less and less a role of political consolidation and becoming more a source of much-craved entertainment for the Chinese. In the 1970s, Mao used the "magic box" for endless propaganda. A typical broadcast started at 7 p.m. with an appearance of Mao and the singing of "The East is Red," China's unofficial national anthem. A news program

[1] Marinucci, Carla. "Advertising's Next Frontier: China," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 June 1987.

[2] *International Television Almanac*. Richard Gertner ed. 1986.

would follow consisting of film stories of strong ideological focus. Finally, a revolutionary ballet or film would run until the station signed off at 10:30 p.m.[1]

Today Chinese viewers may see Deng planting a tree or shaking some hands but, according to Allen Abel in World Press Review (April 1985) they do not see any Leninist harangues. Instead, on a given day, viewers may see:

> Shandong Opera, marionettes, Japanese cartoons, cycling races, a biography of Picasso, lessons on making Korean pickles and folded goldfish, news of meetings in Geneva and of Senator Ted Kennedy in South Africa, a documentary on the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, and two Chinese dressed like flamenco dancers clacking away with castanets...

A director of Beijing TV (the local station) proudly told Abel that his programming is 74% sports and entertainment and he hoped to increase that percentage with more foreign programming and increased transmission hours.

Although China does not have the U.S. equivalent of a ratings system, CCTV is reportedly conducting monthly audience surveys to better understand viewer likes and dislikes.[2] By attempting to find out what people like or want, the Chinese broadcast media seem to be moving even further away from the traditional communist press model which focuses on giving people what they need.

**News**. According to a 1982 Beijing survey conducted by the Beijing Journalism Association, news is the subject of greatest interest across all media. Television rates behind radio and newspapers for urban viewers as the primary source of news, yet is first in rural areas (although general news interest is not as high). Strangely, the unemployed are the group most interested in international news.[3]

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[1]Lent, John A. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific*. 1978.

[2]"The Today Show." With NBC's Tom Brokaw on location in Shanghai, 30 Sept. 1987.

[3]Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986. It should be taken into consideration that, residing in the nation's capital,Beijing residents would probably have a greater taste for political issues and national news .

Audiences rated the news (for all media) as "fairly credible" with the most common criticisms being questionable reporting, stereotyping (either all good or all bad), and monotonous repetition of the same material.

Commenting on news content, Hu Yaobang said, "journalists should give 80 percent of space to reporting good things and achievements and 20 percent to criticizing the seamy side of things and expose our shortcomings.... This conforms with the reality of society."

As characterized in Martin and Chaudhary's book, Comparative Mass Media Systems, China is a "positive news" country. The authors suggest that such countries--most commonly socialist and developing societies--emphasize the good because it tends to stabilize the system, whereas too much negative news can be upsetting and provoke feelings of frustration and a desire for change.

When negative news is unavoidable, a clear ideological bias occurs in the reporting. For example, on December 31, 1986, shortly after the student demonstrations, "News Hookup" (a CCTV evening news program) aired the following news report sequence:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.5 minutes: | video report on a single arrest (person was not actually a student but an unemployed Chinese). |
| 1 minute: | video on arrest of 3 men, showing damaged property and handcuffing (they were not students, either). |
| 5 minutes: | video showing People's Liberation Army men, workers, and students expressing their views on the demonstration. All comments were anti-protest. |
| 1.5 minutes: | video of journalism students who had written a letter to all students saying the demonstration "will not only undermine the situation of stability and unity, but will also hamper reform."[1] |

[1]"News Hookup." *FBIS 31 Dec. 1986.*

The entire video was made after the fact. News is not reported "live" as is popular among the competitive U.S. news networks. The technology is available, but the need for political interpretation and editing prevents on-the-scene reporting. As a matter of fact, all newscasts are pre-recorded. Viewers are particularly reminded of this at times when the newscaster himself is dubbed in when a change has been made. For a few moments he silently mouths his words while the audience hears a voice over giving a preferred political explanation of the news.

Since 1984 broadcasters--men and women--have worn western style clothing. They present the news in a series of brief stories similar to their western counterparts, but most newscasts lack sophisticated graphics or the banter common to our network affiliates. Camera work and editing tends to be poor. The weather is as "high tech" as Chinese TV gets, with the recent introduction of satellite weather pictures and simple, computerized graphics.

When making critical comparisons it's easy to forget Chinese television's relative youth. Simultaneous national news broadcasts didn't begin until 1976 and became a regular program in 1978. Electronic news gathering equipment was introduced in 1980, broadcasting the first big news program in China, the trial of the Gang of Four, to an estimated worldwide audience of 300 million via satellite.

In that same year, the government contracted with VISNEWS (Reuters, NBC, BBC and NHK) and UPITN (UPI and British ITN) for international television news via satellite, adding 10 minutes (with Chinese voice over) to its regular half hour evening news broadcast. Fox Butterfield, The New York Times' first Beijing bureau chief, said:

> Before, the evening news had been largely a turgid rehash of stories from the People's Daily, plus some dreary homemade features on the latest improvement in machine tool production. But now, in living color, without censorship, Chinese could watch the Pope touring Africa, Ronald Reagan winning the U.S. presidential election, political terrorism

in Italy, and even stock-car races in North Carolina and surfing in Hawaii.[1]

Since that time, additional contracts with CBS, CNN and membership in Asiavision news exchange provide even more direct links to international news broadcasts.[2] For example, CCTV receives the 24 hour CNN channel and uses selected reports on its newscasts. Negotiations are currently underway for 24 hours of live broadcasts in major Beijing hotels.[3]

For both domestic and international news, the New China News Agency (XINHUA), is the primary news agency for radio, newspaper, and television. It receives AP, UPI, Reuters, AFP, and Kyodo and proliferates news worldwide with more than 3,000 reporters and editors in Beijing and 6,000 nationwide. International news is also accessible through Voice of America, BBC, and Soviet stations, as well as indirectly through the Chinese press.

In an unprecedented move, Shanghai and Beijing TV now broadcast a 10-15 minute English newscast each night covering local and international news. Started in September 1986, the newscast is intended to "meet the needs of foreign tourists and foreign residents and give the Chinese people a chance to practice English."[4] The broadcasters are Chinese with varying abilities in English.

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[1]Butterfield, Fox. *China, Alive in The Bitter Sea.* 1982.

[2]Lansipuro, Yrjo. "Asiavision News Exchange." *Inter Media*, Jan. 1987. CCTV's Asiavision exchange group includes Iran, two S. Korean stations, Japan, and Indonesia. Each member is free to offer--or not---any news or human interest items they deem of interest. Coordination of Asiavision takes place in Tokyo. Between Jan-Sept 1985 CCTV offered 200 items--mostly soft news with a one-sided political bias.

[3]Belhim, Lisa. "China to Get Newscasts from CNN." *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1987.

[4]"Shanghai TV Station Will Begin Broadcasting a News Program in English." *FBIS 17 Sept. 1986.*

CCTV recently added a 40-minute economic news program which airs daily at 9 p.m. and provides general economic news, market, and international financial information.[1]

**Entertainment**. China has not allowed just western news and technology through its opening door. A wave of western sports and entertainment shows is hitting TVs across the country to the delight of viewers anxious for better and more varied programming.[2]

Programming agreements in 1987 alone included 10 NFL regular season and playoff games,[3] BBC's "Great River Journeys" and "The Living Isles."[4] A 20th Century Fox (Murdoch) agreement is bringing 52 American movies to Sunday programming beginning in October 1987. Such films as "Sound of Music," "Heidi," "How Green Was My Valley," and "The Grapes of Wrath" have been shown thus far by CCTV.[5] The Chinese will also see "Star Trek," "Columbo," "Marcus Welby, MD," "Family Affair," and the mini-series "The Winds of War" through a joint licensing agreement with MCA and Paramount to fill 2 hours of Tuesday night prime time.[6] In a similar 5-year agreement, Lorimar-Telepictures will be offering its program selections including U.S. soaps such as "Falcon Crest," "Knotts Landing," and comedy series such as "Alf," "Valerie," and

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[1] "Television to Carry Economic News Program." *FBIS 28 Jan. 1987.*

[2] A NY & HK marketing consulting firm, China Communications, concluded this in their 1986 study of the Chinese TV viewing audience "Reaching Out to China." Directed to worldwide advertisers, the study also concluded that TV has become "astoundingly significant" to the Chinese people. Survey techniques were not disclosed.

[3] "State Secret." *New York Times*, 26 Jan. 1987. Because the entire season is a delayed broadcast Chinese officials promised not to reveal who won the Superbowl. The article said "package translators have had a full workload coming up with names for the teams, including the Broncos ("Yeman Dui" or Wild Horse Team) and the Giants ("Juren Dui" or Monster Team), as well as players' names.

[4] *The Times*, 12 August 1986.

[5] *The Times*, 2 July 1987.

[6] "Studios Agree on TV Package for China." *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 1987. They will provide about 100 hours of programming the first year.

"Perfect Strangers" to Shanghai TV Network.[1] "Hunter" is already a Chinese favorite. As in all foreign programming agreements, the Chinese network chooses the programs from several offered.

A further sampling of the existing foreign programs include Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck cartoons (1/2 hour every Sunday night),[2] BBC's "Miss Marple," English and French language instruction, and a popular documentary series called "One World." This 15-minute Sunday night series, started in February 1986 and narrated by Chinese American Yue-Sai Kan has covered such topics as stately homes of England, Egyptian culture, Parisian architecture, Japanese festivals, and New York City's ethnic neighborhoods. Kan is the first foreigner allowed by the Chinese to air a TV series designed for Chinese viewers. The show airs twice each Sunday--once in English and once in Chinese. Ms. Kan says future shows will focus on teaching "western manners, dress, makeup, and hairstyles to the Chinese."[3]

Hong Kong's major network (HK-TVB) director Robert Chan said of its relationship with China, "We sell many half-finished products to the Chinese, which they complete and program according to their wishes.... We have just opened a studio at Shenshen for co-production of animated cartoons and concerts."[4]

There is almost total spillover from regular Hong Kong programming into southern China (Guangdong province)--an area already distinct from the rest of China in fashion, prosperity, and attitude due to its proximity to Hong Kong and constant influx of overseas Chinese and foreign visitors.

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[1]"U.S. Soaps Will Be Aired in China," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 Dec. 1986.

[2]"Mickey and Donald." *The Times*, 24 Oct. 1986. Mickey and Donald are familiar characters in China from pre-communist days. The shows are dubbed in Chinese and a great favorite.

[3]Yang, Dori Jones. "Guess What They Watch in China on Sunday Nights." *Business Week*, 19 Jan. 1987.

[4]Sartori, Carlo. "TV Around the World." *World Press Review*, Dec. 1986.

Other agreements include a series of programs on new western ideas in science and technology called "What's New"[1] and a joint venture with Australia for broadcasting the Asian games (to be held in Beijing in 1990) from the International Broadcasting and Television Exchange Center (IBTEC) currently being built next door to CCTV headquarters in Beijing. For long term purposes the facility is intended to facilitate cooperative filming and production efforts between China and other countries.[2] Australia has provided programming to China since 1985. Japan and Brazil have provided a number of popular soap operas for many years.

Domestic entertainment programming includes game shows, opera, drama, sports (the 1988 Olympics will be broadcast live), and documentaries covering Chinese cultural life, history, literature, and art. China is producing about 800 TV dramas a year.[3] These productions have varying levels of ideological content. Many, however, have an educational focus whether political, economic, or intellectual. A typical political drama filmed last year by the Beijing Television Art Center was described as follows:

> The TV drama "Comrade Shaoqi at Anyuan," with the traditional technique of revolutionary realism, warmly lauds the great achievements made by Comrade Liu Shaoqi in leading the workers' movements in Anyuan from 1922 to 1925.[4]

On the lighter side is a comedy series called "Good Morning Peking" about a truck driver who perpetually chases a woman while unwittingly being chased himself by another man (you have to be there?) and a wildly successful quiz show called

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[1] "CCTV to Co-Produce Series on Western Sciences." *FBIS 2 April 1987.* A 3-way agreement between U.S., British, and Chinese broadcast groups to produce 52 1/2 hr. programs. It's the first time CCTV has cooperated on such a large scale to use western-sourced material to produce programs for Chinese viewers. CCTV is responsible for editing, final production, and transmission.

[2] "International Broadcasting and Television Exchange." *FBIS 13 Feb. 1987.*

[3] *International Television Almanac.* Richard Gertner ed. 1986

[4] "Jiangxi's Wan Shaofen Meets TV Author, Producer." *FBIS 25 Nov. 1986.*

"Dandelion." Contestants answer questions about Chinese and world history, literature, geography, math, and logic. They receive prizes from the show's sponsor, the Dutch electronics firm N.V. Philip. CCTV says 35-40 percent of the national viewing audience watch the show; it's required viewing in military camps.[1] There are also series on agriculture, science, and an odd assortment of fashion shows and "model citizen" programs.

For any program produced, sold, or exchanged in China, a permit from the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television must be obtained before any stations may accept it. This regulation, effective as of June 1986, is intended to improve program quality and strengthen government supervision.[2]

**Education**. While evening and weekend programming is filled with news and entertainment (with the exception of popular French, Japanese, and English language instruction programs), day time programming is primarily educational. The Chinese government has made a serious commitment to providing day time education via television. The first "open university" efforts started in 1960 with Peking TV College. By 1979, hampered by television's slow start, there was still only sporadic educational programming in a few urban areas. But in the period from 1979 to 1983 more than 78,000 students graduated from 29 television universities.[3] In 1986 China built more than 700 satellite ground stations and 10,000 receiving centers which can be used for television education across the country, increasing the number of people receiving TV education to one million. Concurrent with the increased facilities, and as part of a scheme to implement 9-year compulsory education, the Chinese government dedicated one TV channel to education beginning October 1986. The channel broadcasts via

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[1]Hood, Marlowe. "Quiz Show in China Entrances Viewers, Even in the Barracks," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 March 1986.

[2]"Ministry to Issue Permits for TV Dramas." *FBIS 7 May 1986*.

[3]Terrell, Robert L. "Modernization and The Media in China." *Gazette*, 1984.

INTELSAT to primarily urban areas in all provinces except Tibet.[1] The resulting network forms the largest distance education system in the world.[2]

In their spare time TV students can take 4 years to complete the 3- year program. Courses are usually taught from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. six days a week and include Chinese language, algebra, geometry, history, geography, physics, chemistry, law, and industrial economic management and use a combination of television lecture, textbooks, and face-to-face tutorials.[3] A majority of the students watch their lessons from offices or factories. As with all of China's higher education, the tuition is free.

In addition, there are some specialized instructional programs available on television for professional development in areas such as education, medicine, and electronics.[4]

Peng Wellan, an observer of Chinese television, says the educational programs today are diametrically opposed to the intolerance of the Cultural Revolution. He commented, "Now they end with a question mark instead of an exclamation point..."

## Television Audience

The International Television Almanac (1986) estimates China's total viewing audience at 75 percent or 800 million. Chinese reports are closer to 400 million. Either way, audience growth estimates and preferences suggest that television will continue to surge in popularity. As evidence, one of the highest circulation Chinese journals is the television digest listing program schedules and reviews.

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[1]"Satellite Ground Stations Boost TV Education." *FBIS 28 Jan. 1987.* The figures--taken from a Chinese official's speech--are much higher than other government sources on media facilities used earlier in this paper. Whether the disparity is a result of exaggeration (common in Chinese statistics) or translation, I'm not sure.

[2]McCormick, Robert. "The Radio and Television Universities and The Development of Higher Education in China." *The China Quarterly,* March 1986.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Terrell, Robert L. "Modernization and The Media in China." *Gazette,* 1984.

According to a study by U.S. ad agency Dancer Fitzgerald Sample, the Chinese who own or have access to sets tend to watch television every day as a family unit--much as Americans did in the 1950s.[1] Ina Chang, a former AP correspondent in China, put it this way:

> The Chinese are obsessed with television--even more so than Americans in the 1950s. I know families who watch two TVs at the same time so they won't miss anything. They watch every evening, all evening, until the stations go off the air.

Television and radio viewers cover the economic and age spectrum--unlike newspaper readership where there is a strong correlation between education and readership. In general, women and youth utilize all media less than men, but are considered to have less time because they work as well as handle more household chores or have to study. When these groups do use the media it tends to be radio and television more than newspapers.

Graphs shown in Appendix A compare television viewership in minutes per day by location, sex, age, education, and occupational groups.[2] To briefly summarize the findings, overall TV viewership ranges from a low of an average 43 minutes per day for students to 118 minutes for retired Chinese. As in other countries, TV viewership has an inverse relation to education level with illiterates on one extreme watching an average of 111 minutes of television per day while college educated Chinese view an average 60 minutes per day.

Except in the under 17 or over 61 age categories (the former having very little viewing time and the latter plenty), differences are more noticeable by occupation than age with teachers and scientists watching less than workers or peasants. The

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[1] Alsop, Ronald. "Marketing," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 1987.

[2] Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986. Beijing is not a typical locale, but given the rapid development of TV nationwide, the Beijing audience may well be a predictor of future national viewing habits.

occupational comparison seems to merely restate the level of education correlation to TV viewership. Finally, rural viewership is quite high considering a sizably lower share of TV sets per 100 households, reinforcing the concept of group audiences.

Although the comparisons may be valid, it should be noted that the average minutes per day are 1982 figures. Since then transmission time has increased significantly. Unsubstantiated estimates by foreign residents of China, put average urban viewership closer to 5 hours per day.[1]

## A Final Word

The television industry in China is experiencing rapid growth. This growth is supported by government policy which inextricably links it with China's modernization and fueled by rising prosperity, encouraging consumers to buy more television sets. Although still a primary conveyor of political messages, television's programming expansion seems to be moving in the direction of increased entertainment fare, repeating history already made in other industrialized countries and maybe hinting at some internal political change.

Television's enormous popularity may just be because the CCP is <u>not</u> monopolizing the audience with endless revolutionary propaganda. Instead, the Chinese are watching an unusual potpourri of programs whose selection is arbitrary and sometimes seems irrational. One must wonder if the intended impacts of ideological drama, model citizen programs, or Chinese opera may soon be negated by the growing influx of western movies, soaps, and commercials. Although approved by Chinese officials, the differences between political and economic systems are difficult to disguise on these shows. What will the long term impacts be? This question is one familiar to many developing countries actively importing programming.

[1]Campbell, Todd and Ina Chang. Personal Interview, 10 Nov. 1987.

Traditional Chinese culture has already been upset by government campaigns which ruptured families and discouraged intellectual pursuit--both age old Confucian ideals. Today, for China to achieve much needed modernization, western economic concepts must confront years of Chinese isolation and ethnocentrism. Whether good or bad, western ideas, previously accessed only by intellectuals and a minority of upper class elites, are now available through television and other media to broad social strata.

Although television cannot take exclusive blame for China's modernization pains, it does incite a broader world view which may contribute to changing attitudes. For example, there is a generation gap appearing in China. Youth who never experienced pre-communist times are becoming entranced by western fashion, music, products, and attitudes. Social and political alienation--in the forms of juvenile delinquency, petty crime, or personal indulgence--are on the rise. The Army and Party have loss much status among youth. Very few young people want to join. Finally, with students going abroad to study in the thousands, such trends could be difficult to reverse.

Television's future as a popular and pervasive communications medium is probably irreversible. The satellites are in space, the stations are built, and TV sets are selling at 7.1 million a year. The Chinese seem obsessed with television; they prefer it to any other form of entertainment with the possible exception of Sundays in the park.

The television industry's general health and growth in program offerings is most likely tied to the political and economic future of China. That is harder to predict. As long as Deng's economic and policy reforms are basically working, political reversal seems unlikely; the Chinese will continue to see a mix of domestic and foreign programming and advertisements, expanding and influencing their world view and consumer behavior. It should also be noted that in 1997, China will be in full control of Hong Kong, a capitalist economy already exerting much influence on southern China.

It is hard to anticipate what further influences will occur. The question may really be whether China has come too far to turn back.

Still, Maoism runs deep. There are party conservatives very disturbed by the "evil winds" of western interaction and the slow separation of the function of the CCP from that of government. Although many experts believe that Deng's resignation will have little effect on China's current course, it would not be out of historical character for China to close up as quickly as it opened up. Such change would, no doubt, dramatically affect the course and content of the television revolution.

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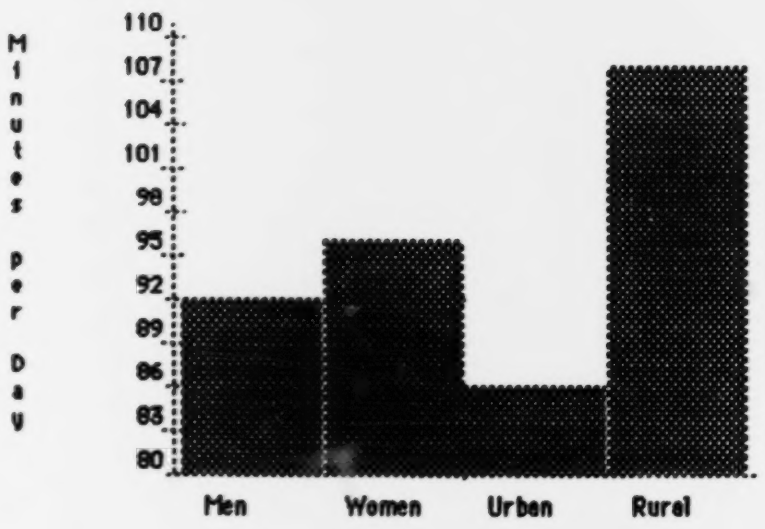
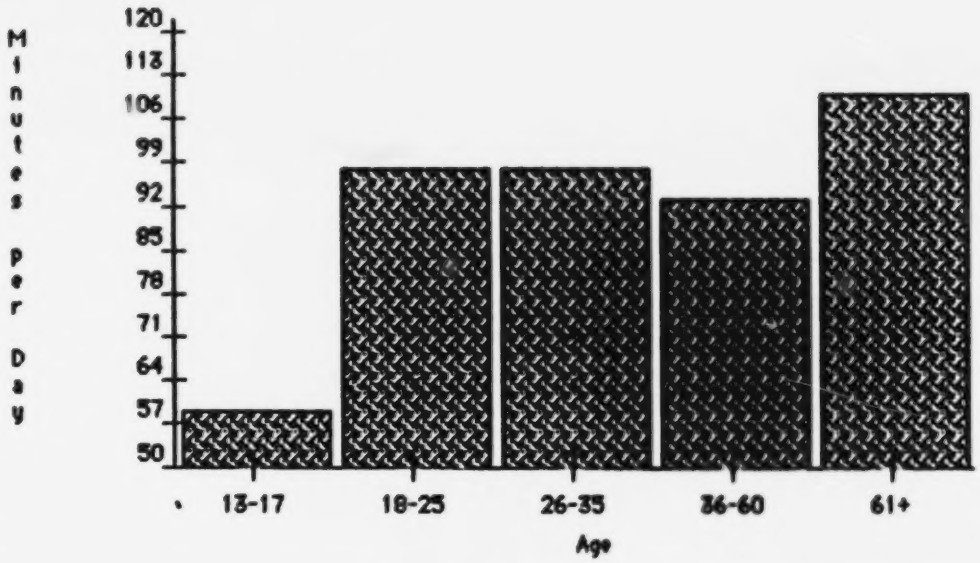
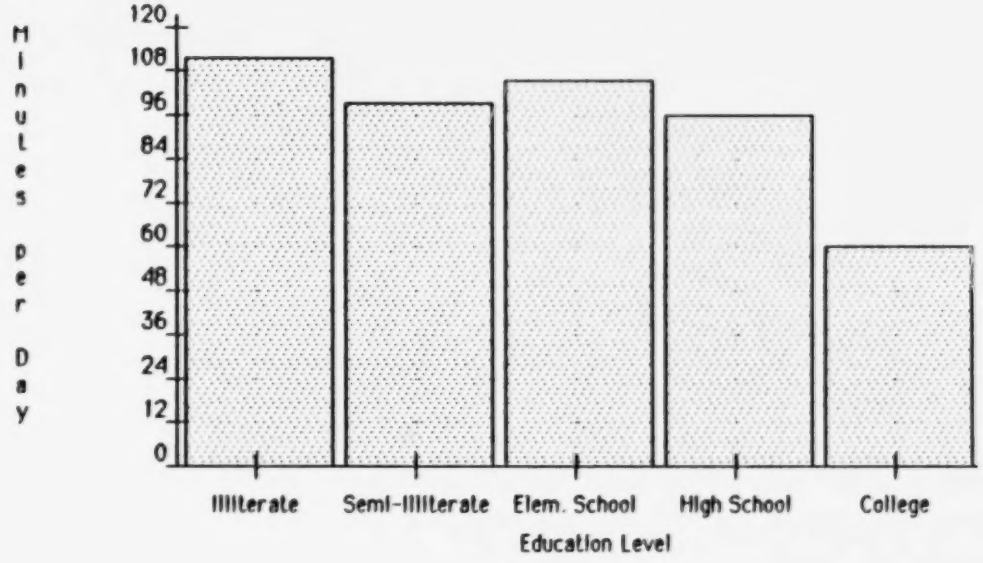
## Appendix A

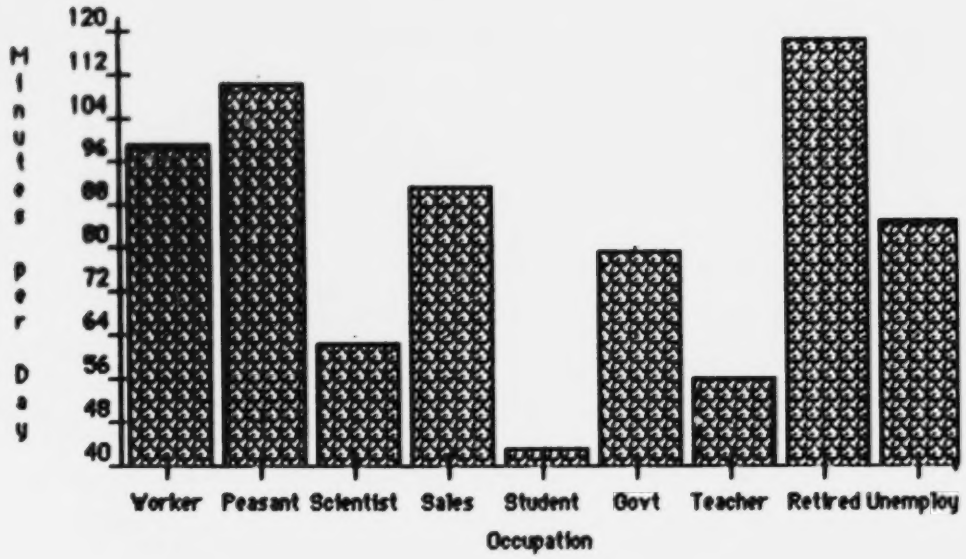
### Time Spent Watching Television (1982)




Information for the graphs was compiled from the following sources: Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. 1987; Womack, Brantly. "Media and The Chinese Public: A Survey of the Beijing Media Audience." *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*. Spring/Summer, 1986; Sartori, Carol, "TV Around the World." *World Press Review*, Dec. 1986; and *International Television Almanac*. Richard Gertner ed. 1986.


Minutes per Day
120
113
106
99
92
85
78
71
64
57
50
13-17
18-25
26-35
36-60
61+
Age


Minutes per Day
120
108
96
84
72
60
48
36
24
12
0
Illiterate
Semi-Illiterate
Elem. School
High School
College
Education Level


Minutes per Day
120
112
104
96
88
80
72
64
56
48
40
Worker
Peasant
Scientist
Sales
Student
Govt
Teacher
Retired
Unemploy
Occupation

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